

Description, Action, or Attitude? A Translator's Remark on Two Novels by Romesh Gunesequera and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

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ABSTRACT

Combining translation and linguistic studies, the article introduces two less-known immigrant writers Romesh Gunesequera and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and their novels *Reef* and *The Mistress of Spices*, which were both translated by the author. The novels reflect the social and political problems in Sri Lanka and India which make their citizens flee abroad. The stories are well narrated by poetic language and brought their authors international recognition. Especially the descriptive passages in both novels are very impressive and are considered here as specific language structures. A partial analysis of typical sentence elements of such passages in comparison with their Czech equivalents is the main aim of this article. Apart from that, a general comment on the main characters of the two stories and implications of different cultures are supplemented.

KEYWORDS

Romesh Gunesequera, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices*, *Reef*, translation studies, sentence structures, descriptive passage

Introduction

The authors Romesh Gunesequera and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni belong to diaspora writers, but may not be so well-known in the Czech Republic as Kureishi, Hosseini, Mukherjee and other Asian writers.¹ Nevertheless, their books are certainly worth reading. The two writers come from different countries, but they left them almost at the same time – in the seventies. Upon leaving their homelands, they hoped for a better life in a foreign country just like the heroes of their novels. Gunesequera has lived and worked in Britain since the age of seventeen and Divakaruni moved to the U.S.A when she was about twenty. They are both considered to be successful authors with a genuine interest in the fate of their people and their works are acclaimed as outstanding for their stories, for the high quality of language and style and have been honoured by literary awards.

Having left Sri Lanka in 1971, Romesh Gunesequera moved to England where he studied English and philosophy. At the beginning of his professional career he wrote poetry, but his later works are mostly short stories or novels, whose language and imaginative vision give evidence of poetic perception of the world. His first book is a collection of short stories, *Monkfish Moon* (1992), dealing with the unfortunate political situation in Sri Lanka. Gunesequera's first novel *Reef* is commonly believed to be his best book and was short-listed for the 1994 Booker Prize. His further two books *The Sandglass* (1988) and *Heaven's Edge* (2002) reflect ethnic fights and constant problems in his mother country in more detail than *Reef*. Both books were awarded further prizes.

Gunesequera's latest book *The Match* (2008) differs from his other works in presenting some autobiographical hints. According to the reviewers, the novel keeps

1 For more see Karel Helman, *Postavy imigrantek v dílech současných amerických etnických autorek* (Praha: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2009).

the tradition of profound philosophical thinking and remarkable style with a really extensive range of vocabulary, typical for all his novels.

Gunasekera's quiet and elegant, yet sharp and precise prose deserves without any doubt to be counted among the best writing from the literary flourishing subcontinent, and—as he has made a second home in London—in the same measure among the best young writers in the British literary landscape.

The immigrant experience informs all of Gunasekera's writing, but in a decidedly different vein than Rushdie's comic grotesquerie, V.S. Naipaul's venom, or Bharati Mukherjee's uncompromising disdain.²

Gunasekera lives and works in London. He is a member of the Advisory Board of the Asia House Festival of Asian Literature and is one of the writers-in-residence for the charity First Story.³

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni left India for the United States after she got her B.A. degree in 1976. Having finished her master's and later Ph.D. degrees in the U.S.A., she teaches creative writing at the University of Houston and is an active member of Maitri, a helpline founded in 1991 for South Asian women, dealing with domestic abuse. Divakaruni started as a poet, and has been writing both poetry and fiction all through her career. The list of her publications is longer than that of Gunasekera, consisting of seven novels and several books of short stories and poetry. Her works, as well as Gunasekera's, have been translated into many languages and have brought her fame in many countries of the world. She, too, is a winner of numerous prizes. *The Mistress of Spices* was short-listed for the Orange Prize and the reviews of all her books are very positive. The novel *The Mistress of Spices* was used as a script for the film of the same name.

Here are just two examples of the appraising reviews of her writing:

Beautifully told stories of transformed lives...Both liberated and trapped by cultural changes on both sides of the ocean, these women struggle fiercely to carve out an identity of their own.⁴

Divakaruni not only conveys emotions with stunning accuracy, she also transforms the outer world—every room and article of clothing, every instance of snow, rain, and sunshine—into reflections of the soul.⁵

Reef and The Mistress of Spices

When translating *Reef*, I was not only impressed by the story itself, but I felt as if I spent the time in the far-away beautiful country and could smell the aroma of Triton's cooking, due to the excellent quality of its language. Similarly, I was immediately taken into the middle of the troublesome lives of the main heroes of the novel *The Mistress of Spices* and I perceived fully the magic power of spices.

In both novels the way of narrating stories is truly dynamic. Personal dreams come (or not come) true and the characters keep pondering about what is and what is not important for living a good and satisfying life. Mister Salgado (*Reef*) says at the end of

the novel: "You know, Triton, ... we are only what we remember, nothing more ... all we have is the memory of what we have done; whom we might have touched, even for a moment..."⁶ And such 'touching' of minds and souls even for a short moment, but influencing the way of thinking and living can be found in *The Mistress*, too: "The old man didn't move or speak. But I felt the pull of him on my arms and legs. A warm pull, as though he and I were formed of the same substance. ... I couldn't understand the language, but the meaning was clear enough."⁷

Reef is a story whose important background is Sri Lanka. Reading the story alerts readers to the disasters in the country, its political problems, ethnic fights and the very difficult life of individual people, but in the novel, these problems are mostly just a topic of conversation at parties and talks or of thoughts of the protagonists. They are more witnesses of the political changes and everyday hardships than their sufferers. Triton, the narrator of the whole story, a boy who became a devoted servant of his master, Mister Salgado, says: "My life until then had been the same as the lives of all those who leave their unhappy homes, their squabbling families, their claustrophobic riverbank asylums, and break out into a clear world beckoning from beyond the edge of their dreams" And he goes on speaking about the victims of political fights:

Our barbarities were startling but domestic: the dismembering of an adulterous husband ... But there were no death squads then, no thugs so callous in their killing that they felt no pleasure until they saw someone twitch against a succession of bullets. In my childhood no one dreamed of leaving a body to rot where it had been butchered, as people have had to learn to do more recently.⁸

The novel focuses on growing up and understanding the world (Triton) and fighting against windmills (Salgado). Moreover, it deals with subtle relations between people, with forming human personality, modification and shaping the mind and with the ability to comprehend other people. Triton comes to Mister Salgado's house as a boy to be his servant and later a kind of companion. His growing emotions to his master include not only admiration, devotedness and love, but also a kind of sexual tension. "Triton made it, my Mister Salgado said. Triton made it. It was bliss. My coming of age. 'Your cook?' Your life, your everything. I wanted to sing pinned up on the rafters, heaven between my legs."⁹ At the same time, he is attracted by the beauty of Salgado's girl-friend Nili. Gunasekera's way of letting the reader know about the main characters' fine nuances of feelings and emotions through the talk of the boy Triton belongs to the major qualities of the novel. Triton enjoys being praised by Nili for his cooking; he appreciates her advice and her interest in himself. The following paragraph connected with Christmas dinner gives evidence of his slow process of changing from a boy to a man. He longs for love, feels new overwhelming emotions but his sexual orientation does not seem to be well-defined, yet:

The nape of her neck was bare..... Her ears moved too when she spoke. They were larger than I expected. Each with two symmetrical wrinkles where they joined her neck and the outer edges curled in like the edge of a puppadum when it hits hot oil. My instinct was to press the ears back with my hands and keep the entrances to her soul open like the

2 <http://biography.jrank.org/pages/4385/Gunasekera-Romesh.html#ixzz1RnzsXzAv>, accessed May 10, 2011.

3 First story is a literary charity founded in 2007 to improve literacy and foster creativity in young people through creative writing in UK schools.

4 *San Francisco Chronicle*. http://www.chitradivakaruni.com/books/arranged_marriage, accessed May 14, 2011.

5 *Booklist*, http://www.chitradivakaruni.com/books/arranged_marriage, accessed May 14, 2011.

6 Gunasekera, *Reef* (London: Granta Publications, 1994), 180.

7 Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices* (New York: Anchor Books, 1997), 214-5.

8 Gunasekera, *Reef*, 31,32

9 Gunasekera, *Reef*, 65

lips of a glazed pink conch. ... My sarong, tight around my hips, brushed her arm. She didn't notice.¹⁰

From the very beginning of the novel, Triton wants to learn as much as he can from his Master including his way of thinking: "All I have to do is watch you, Sir. Watch what you do. That way I can really learn," and "But with my Mister Salgado I thought I might find something more, something that would really change the world and make our lives worthwhile."¹¹

Mr. Salgado is a marine biologist and a lonely philosopher, too. He would like to keep up the rich natural and cultural heritage of his country and hates violence of any kind. He is not assertive enough in promoting his projects as well as in keeping pace with some eccentricities of his girl-friend Nili, who finally leaves him for another man. Both in professional and personal life he is an allusion to the famous Don Quixote. Even at the end of the novel when he decides to return to Sri Lanka to help Nili, who had got into serious trouble, the situation is the same. On the other hand, his departure breaks the firm bond between Triton and his master, who had always been his guru, his idol and benefactor. Triton will profit from the knowledge, experience and the way of contemplating that he had learned from his master, but from the moment Mister Salgado decides to return to Sri Lanka, he must start building his own life, he will be independent – practically and emotionally. And he realizes that with relief: "I would remain and finally have to learn to live on my own. Only then did it dawn on me that this might be what I wanted deep down inside. What perhaps I have always wanted."¹²

The Mistress of Spices contains many features of the fairy tales genre – magic, spell, personification, conjuring tricks, etc. There are snakes and ravens who speak and the spices that not only speak, but make people do what they decided that should be done, let things disappear and change totally the way of life. Tilo, the protagonist, goes through a number of unrealistic changes in her life and then she agrees to become the Mistress of Spices. This means to live a lonely life far-away from the island where she had learned all about the power of spices. After an oath to use the magic of spices for the benefit of her people outside their mother country, she passes Shampati fire and wakes as an old woman in Oakland, in a shop full of spices.

Carrying out her promise, she is in close touch with Indian immigrants in America and is personally involved in all the troubles they get into. Men came to America to earn money to support their families and never expected that only low-grade work would be available for them and they would be hated by the natives, because they might have taken their jobs. Women suffer even more, because they can seldom feed their children: "And worst of all the mouths, the mouths coming to me even after I finally sleep, the mouths crumpled with hunger so many days this month, crying: 'So good Amma give us another half spoon more please Amma please ...'"¹³

Moreover, Indian women in America are bound by social laws and restrictions relevant in their homeland and it is extremely difficult to break them and become equal partners in their married lives and successful members of American society. Included in the story of the Mistress, who uses the power of spices and her own magic to help Indian immigrants, is her love story with an American of an unusual background.

¹⁰ Gunsekera, *Reef*, 88-9

¹¹ Gunsekera, *Reef*, 43, 31

¹² Gunsekera, *Reef*, 180

¹³ Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices*, 64

This story is the pivot of the film *The Mistress of Spices* and it is surprisingly bad. It presents the book as a mediocre love story with a colourful background of the spice store and occasional hints to the problems of its Indian customers. Even if it is usual that films based on books can never cover all the details of the story and the beauty of their language, this major change is difficult to understand and raises a question whether Divakaruni had agreed with the film version. Some of the reviews of the film such as that by Peter Howell of *Toronto Star* are deeply negative (in contrast with positive reviews of the book): "About all that can be said about *The Mistress of Spices* is that actress Rai (Aishwarya Rai) manages to retain a straight face while uttering some of the most risible dialogue ever heard in a supposedly serious drama."¹⁴

Grammatical structure of descriptive passages in the two novels

Well-written descriptive passages in novels are very often a proof of a good writer. With the correctly chosen vocabulary, the writer achieves that the passage appeals to all readers' senses and arouses their imagination and strong emotions. Similarly to a great painting, a well written text visualizes a particular scene, almost gives the described sounds audibility or smell of the fragrance depicted.

The choice of word classes in descriptive passages depends on the situation or event mentioned. Each of the major word classes has a specific value in description and it is the writer's decision to prefer adjectives to verbs or nouns.¹⁵ The focus may be on detail, on action or emotions and the paragraph becomes more effective if unusual collocations are used. A wide range of figures of speech and specific connotations of the words multiply the impact of descriptions, involve the reader deeply in the scene and allow them to perceive the details of the story as if watching it on the stage.

The power of an impressive descriptive passage, however, is not only in the good choice of most suitable vocabulary, which is linked together with inventive power, but also in the structure of the text, in which the arrangement of phrases and clauses helps the author to fully engage the attention of the reader and cause their personal involvement in the scene. Halliday considers a text to be not only a semantic unit, but a social exchange of meaning where its correct structure guarantees cohesion and the resulting impact on the reader/listener. The authors should follow this recommendation in description more than in any other piece of text.¹⁶

When translating texts into languages which are typologically different from the original one, a specific attention should be paid to the structures of the target language so that they would expound the atmosphere of the described moment to the reader with the same power and eloquence. Knittlová comments:

The difference in using syntactic means in English and Czech can influence significantly the impression of the original and target text.... of grasping the reality behind the language: the English language expresses it in a more condensed and compact way, it often uses implications not only within lexical units, but also in the amount of information highlighted

¹⁴ Comments on the film *The Mistress of Spices*. http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1176223-mistress_of_spices/, accessed May 15, 2011.

¹⁵ See Jarmila Tárníková, *From Text to Texture* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2002), 25.

¹⁶ See Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social- Semiotic Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

in the surface structure... The imbalance between English and Czech is considerable, too, because Czech, more than English, expresses its attitude towards the conveyed reality.¹⁷

The translator of such passages should be aware of the structural differences between the English and Czech languages and also able to employ thoroughly all the lexical and grammatical means of the target language.

For my research I have collected twenty examples of descriptive passages from each novel and I would like to add a few remarks on their grammatical structures and compare them with their Czech equivalents. In the brief analysis of individual passages of varied descriptions in both novels, I would like to pay attention to the following grammatical features:

- a) the usage of non-finite verb phrases (NF VP), mainly participles, as condensers and adjectives;
- b) NF VPs as the only verb forms in main clauses/simple sentences;
- c) verbless main clauses (VMC) or simple sentences (VSS);
- d) highly complex noun phrases (NP).

The decision to concentrate on the above-mentioned structures is based on my previous research concerning the functions of the English -ing forms and their translation¹⁸ and a detailed knowledge of the texts of both novels. My hypothesis is that the structures mentioned in items a), b), d) will show high frequency.

Reef

Descriptive passages in this novel are numerous and include different situations, ranging from a description of the form of ears of two people (p.56), a landscape passing along a driven car (p.59) or a water tank from Triton's young days (p.33) to a paragraph trying to include the reader into a very dramatic situation in which the varieties of sound play an important role (p.19) or a scene from a fish market where a shark is being killed by a fishmonger (p. 117). Some passages are meant to just evoke a similar image that is on the mind of the narrator (pp.33 or 51, etc.), others are full of emotions (pp.36 or 100, etc.), still others try to let the reader imagine the same colours, sounds or smells (pp. 117 or 172, etc.). Most descriptions are objective – they focus on the details of the given situation/scene and do not include or imply the author's comment or attitude to what is being described.

The first example depicts the scenery passing along a moving car, where the reader should perceive sounds, colours and movement. (Prevalence of -ing forms expressing circumstance or condensing relative clauses and others functioning as adjectives; occasional usage of the – ed participle):

We drove for hours; whistling over a ribbon of tarmac measuring the perpetual embrace of the shore and the sea, bounded by a fretwork of undulating cocoanut trees, pure unadorned forms framing the seascape into a kaleidoscope of bluish jewels. Above us a tracery of green and yellow leaves arrowed to a vanishing-point we could never reach. At times the road

17 Dagmar Knittlová et al., *Překlad a překládání* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2010), 123-4. (my translation)

18 See Libuše Hornová, "Poznámka k funkci a překladu anglických -ing tvarů jako větných kondenzorů," *Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis - Philologica* 49 (1983): 21-32; Libuše Hornová, "Czech Equivalents of English -ing Forms as Noun Postmodifier," *Brno Studies in English* 19 (1991): 119-126.

curved as though it were the edge of a wave itself rushing in and then retreating into the ocean.¹⁹

Jeli jsme hodiny a hodiny. Fičeli jsme po stuze asfaltové silnice, která odměřovala křivku, v níž se snoubí moře s pevninou, lemovanou mřížovím vlnících se kokosovníků, čistými, prostými tvary, jimiž prosvítalo moře jako v kaleidoskopu namodralých drahokamů. Jemný ornament zelených a žlutých listů nad našimi hlavami jako by směřoval do nedohledna, k bodu, jehož nemůžeme nikdy dosáhnout. Občas silnice prudce zatočila jako hřeben vlny, která se náhle přivalí a pak se zase stáhne do oceánu.²⁰

The following passage concentrates on different kinds of movement (which is not expressed by finite verb forms and clauses, but again by a great number of -ing participles used as condensers or adjectives, occasionally replaced by –ed participles):

The shallow water seethed with creatures. Flickering eyes, whirling tails, fish of a hundred colours darting and digging, sea snakes, sea-slugs, tentacles sprouting and grasping everywhere. It was a jungle of writhing shapes, magnified and distorted, growing at every move, looming out of the unknown, startling in its hidden brilliance.²¹

Mělká voda přímo vřela množstvím nejrůznějších živočichů. Třpytivé oči, kroutící se ocasy, ryby stovek barev, mořští hadi a okurky, všechno se to mrskalo a divoce do sebe naráželo. Všude se zvedala nějaká chapadla a zachycovala se, čeho se dalo. Byla to džungle pokroucených těl, zrcadlením vody ještě zvětšených a pokřivených; každým pohybem jako by mohutněla, vynořovala se z neznáma a děsila svou skrytou oslnivostí.²²

The Mistress of Spices

The number of dramatic descriptive passages in this novel is also very high and when trying to analyze them, the same criteria (see above) have been applied. As in *Reef*, we can find passages focusing on colours (pp. 4, 84, 121, etc.), smells (pp. 63, 71, 149), sounds (p. 23, 67, 110, 242, etc.) and strong emotions (pp. 257, 306, etc.), but there are also many paragraphs in which the Mistress describes the serious problems of her co-expatriates (pp.180 - 1, 182 - 3, 64 - 66, 126, etc.) which speak of pain, pity and wrath. The perception of individual senses is usually mixed – it is not easy to find a passage in which just one is aroused. Not only the story, but also descriptions are marked by the author's feelings and opinions and are therefore subjective.

The first example is a description of a place and an event (wedding) and includes implicitly the author's attitude to the situation. This combination is most typical for the entire novel. (The prevailing NF VP in this passage is past participle in the function of an adjective or a condenser; -ing participles condense relative and circumstance clauses):

Burned-out streetlamps, grilled storefronts, brick-lined alleywalls slashed with letters dripping blackness. Wedding canopy, wail of *shehnais*, a girlbride in *shahara* seeing for the first time the stooped, wrinkled man her father sold her to. Turbaned coolies, drinking *daru* and playing cards by open drains. Garment factories smelling of starch and sweat and

19 Gunesequera, *Reef*, 59.

20 R. Gunesequera, *Útes*, trans. Libuše Hornová (Praha: Nakladatelství Paseka, 2002), 64-65.

21 Gunesequera, *Reef*, 176.

22 Gunesequera, *Útes*, 174-175.

immigration raids, women handcuffed and piled crying into vans. Children coughing and struggling blind out of sleep into lung-burning gas.²³

Vyhořelé pouliční lampy, dveře obchodů za mřížemi, cihlové zídky úzkých uliček, podrápaných písmeny, jejichž čern je rozmazaná. Svatební baldachýn, kvílení dřevěného hoboje, mladá nevěsta ve svatebních šatech poprvé vidí toho shrbeného vrásčitého muže, kterému ji otec prodal. Kuliové v turbanech pijí laciný alkohol a hrají karty poblíž otevřených kanálů. Oděvní fabriky páchnou škrobem a potom a zátah imigračních úřadů nasadí pouta mnoha ženám. Plačící je nacpou do dodávek. Kašlající děti se neklidně probouzejí ze spánku a vdechují vzduch plný nezdravých výparů, který jim spaluje plíce.²⁴

The next passage involves more activity, implies strong emotions and is again subjective (action is expressed by F VPs and the -ing participles):

Inside her head the images tumbling hot and sere like clothes left too long in a dryer. A hard male elbow holding her down on the mattress, a knee pushing her thighs apart. And when she tries to claw, to bite (soundlessly, for no one outside the bedroom must know the *saram*), a slap to the head. Not hard, but the shock of it makes her go limp so he can do what he wants. The worst are the kisses after it is over, kisses that leave their wetness on her mouth, and his slaked repentant voice in her ear, lingering.²⁵

V hlavě se jí převalují obrázky horké a pomačkané jako prádlo ponechané příliš dlouho v sušičce. Svalnatý mužský loket ji tlačí k matraci a koleno rozráží stehna. Když se pokouší škrábat a kousat (nezvučně, protože nikdo nesmí za dveřmi ložnice o té ostudě vědět), dostane ránu do hlavy. Ne silnou, ale způsobí jí to takový šok, že ochabne a on může dokončit, co začal. A nejhorší jsou polibky po tom všem, polibky, které jí na rtech zanechávají vlhkost, a v uších pořád přetrvává jeho uspokojený a kajicný hlas.²⁶

Conclusions

The following partial and only approximate conclusions are drawn from all the forty excerpts of descriptive passages from both novels, even if only two examples of each set were presented here.

a) The number and functions of -ing and -ed participles:

The frequency of participles within the descriptive passages is twice higher than in the rest of the text. In *Reef* the -ing participles outnumber -ed participles and their total number is higher than that in *The Mistress of Spices*. Both participles are used in their typical functions – parts of complex verb forms, condensers of subordinate clauses and as adjectives, but also as the only verb forms in main clauses.

b) Participles as the only verb forms in main clauses or simple sentences.

This structural feature is well-known from newspaper headlines where sentences are shortened by participles (or other NF VPs) to include enough attractive information that would make the reader be interested in the whole article. These structures do not break

the basic rule that main clauses or simple sentences must have a F VP, they are results of eliding the auxiliary verb 'to be' (and the subject), which is a significant feature of both headlines and the analyzed descriptive passages. In description, however, it has been proved that the main aim is not only a shorter sentence, but action.

Action is usually connected with finite verb forms and it is gerunds, not participles that are considered to express action.²⁷ In my previous extensive research of the English -ing forms,²⁸ it was already suggested that they are not static. The analysis of the whole corpus of descriptive passages shows high occurrence of complex sentences where not only subordinate, but also main clauses include just the participle and it is a very effective way of making the description dynamic. This result of the brief structural analysis of descriptive passages is most significant.

c) Verbless main clauses or simple sentences.

The number of such structures is not very high in these novels and when identified, they are usually the result of ellipses within existential sentences. Verbless main clauses/simple sentences in descriptions could have been exclamatory statements expressed by adjectives, adverbs or nouns (e.g.: Beautiful. Terribly. The shark.). But the authors hardly use any such structures. When there is a verbless simple sentence, e.g.: "Except inside his head,"²⁹ it follows an existential main clause: "[...], there is no other movement."³⁰ Also in other examples of verbless main clauses/simple sentences, the elided subject and verb are usually easy to discover from the context. Seldom do they have exclamatory force, they are just statements, sometimes implied questions: "Dry dead things. But her."³¹

d) Complex noun phrases.

It is not surprising to discover that descriptive passages contain a lot of complex NPs. Their analysis, however, may bring some new factors. Noun phrases in all the excerpted descriptive passages include characteristically numerous post-modifying elements. In pre-modification there are mostly determiners and adjectives (often expressed by participles).

In English, post-modification of NPs comprises prepositional phrases, finite and non-finite verb phrases (clauses) and adverbials. In the given corpus the prevailing post-modifying element is the -ing participle (especially in *Reef*). The -ed participle is not so common (more frequent in *The Mistress of Spices*) and in both novels there are finite clauses and PPs. With the ellipses mentioned above, it often happens that the whole paragraph is a sequence of NPs only (or verbless main clauses/simple sentences).

To summarize the results of this partial analysis of the grammatical structure of descriptive passages in the two discussed novels, it can be declared that the most frequent sentence element is the -ing participle. It functions as an adjective, condenser and also as the only verb form in main clauses or simple sentences (due to ellipsis). Its usage is not much influenced by the aim of description (movement, sound, colour, touch or emotions) and it brings to the passage the same amount of action as finite verb forms. Divakaruni uses more -ed participles and finite verb forms than Gunesequera. There are

23 Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices*, 56.

24 Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Vládkyně koření*, trans. Libuše Hornová (Brno: Nakladatelství Jota, 2011), 47.

25 Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices*, 106.

26 Divakaruni, *Vládkyně koření*, 87.

27 Compare Libuše Dušková et al. *Mluvnice současné angličtiny na pozadí češtiny* (Praha: Academia, 1988).

28 See Hornová, "Poznámka k funkci a překladu anglických -ing tvarů jako větných kondenzorů," 21-32.

29 Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices*, 179.

30 Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices*, 179.

31 Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices*, 165.

not too many verbless main clauses/ simple sentences and noun phrases in both novels are rather complex with the -ing / -ed participles as their most frequent post-modifying elements. These facts show that the dynamism of descriptive passages in the two novels is based mostly on the -ing participle. The action force of these passages is supported by the structure of complex NPs, where the crucial elements are again participles.

The prevailing number of participles are translated into Czech by the following equivalents with the descending frequency: a) finite verb forms if they function as counterparts of condensers in complex sentences, post-modification of NPs or the only verb forms in main clauses/simple sentences; b) adjectives or participles if they function as adjectives; c) nouns or verbal nouns, occasionally prepositional phrases.

Finite verb forms in Czech instead of participles in English are very common and it is in concord with the major characteristics of the two languages – English as a language with nominal and Czech with verbal tenor.³² If circumstance or relative clauses, condensed by participles are translated by finite verb forms, it only superficially looks like adding more action to the sentence. The results of the brief analysis of the structure of descriptive passages and their translation, as well as my previous research, prove that participles (especially the -ing participle) are not static language elements and they reveal almost the same amount of action as finite verb forms in their Czech translation.

There is one more feature of the language in the two novels that might be pointed out. A special flavour is added to their high-standard English by including in the text words or phrases in the mother tongue of the main heroes. In *Reef* the language in question is Sinhalese, in *The Mistress of Spices* it is Bengalese. The number of such words or phrases is more numerous in *The Mistress* than in *Reef* and the situations in which they appear in the text are not exactly the same. In *Reef* they are often used with people's titles, their position in society or they express relations between people, as seen by the narrator of the story, Triton, a boy and a servant, e.g.: *Pando-nona* (Mrs. Pando), *Pando-mahathaya* (Mr. Pando), Nili started to be *Nili-nona* when she moved to Mister Salgado's house. *Lucy-amma* is the woman-servant in the house, very kind to Triton and therefore mother-like person to him. There are Sinhalese expressions referring to Triton's cooking (*vadai, pol-kiri-badun, pittu, ganja*), names of some animals (*batagoya, mora*) and occasionally of some traditional feast days (*poya*). In *The Mistress of Spices* a lot of native expressions are identified for various types of spices (*shalparni, lanka, methi*) and for Indian sweets and meals (*pulao, biriyani, gulab-jamuns*). There are words expressing family relations or respect (*mataji, amma, dada, didi*) and occasional phrases (*Pyari, meri jaan*), which are either explained immediately or left as they are to let the reader understand them from the context or perceive them as a kind of chant or magic words which take the readers into the situation and stimulate their imagination.

The frequency of using words from those exotic languages is well balanced. The foreign expressions do not disturb the attention of the reader, on the other hand, they feel like good music accompanying a recited poem or a dramatic dialogue and they take the readers into the far-away country whose people speak the language. Curious readers may also try to find the exact meaning of the word/phrase in a dictionary or the Internet, which will certainly open a new world for them, because it will most probably not only provide translation or basic explanation of the meaning, but there will be references to other web pages informing those interested about the different culture and customs of the given country, its history and religion, not to mention exotic cooking recipes and different fauna and flora.

The usage of native words in the works of Asian authors written in English is not uncommon and the writers include them in their texts to give the readers an opportunity to get in touch with the language of the country where they were born or where their families come from. As was already suggested, through the pieces of these languages the readers may learn new facts about these countries and the phrases in an unknown language will certainly draw them closer into the atmosphere of the story. When Asian novels are translated into Czech, it is usually the decision of the editor whether to keep the foreign language items in the text as they are in the original or to deal with them in a different way. There are basically three approaches with some variations: a) to translate all the words with or without keeping the original expressions; b) to translate a part of them and keep the rest; c) to translate (or explain) the foreign expression in a mini-dictionary at the end of the novel (as for example in the translation of Hosseini's book *Kite Runner*³³). Nevertheless, not many readers are patient enough to look up the word in the added dictionary whenever they find one in the text.

In the two novels discussed in this article the b) variant was chosen. The Czech equivalents of a part of the foreign words were provided by experts in the individual languages and a good proportion was left in the text. There is a question, why Czech readers are usually not allowed to have the same amount of the exotic languages in the translation they are reading as their English colleagues reading the original and why they should need an extra mini-dictionary or explanations. A possible answer could be that Czech readers are more inquisitive and want to know all the details connected with books they have chosen for the few moments of their free time.

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32 Vilém Mathesius, *A Functional Analysis of English* (Praha: Academia, 1975).

33 Khaled Hosseini, *Kite Runner* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003), Czech translation: K. Hosseini, *Lovec draků*. (Praha: Nakladatelství Leda, 2009).

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